

Cool drinks heat up summer sales

FsVoice

Jun 16, 2015

EMAIL SHARE Tweet g+1 Recommend 23

COMMENTS 0

Operators add excitement to beverage menus by featuring inventive iced coffees and teas. Sponsored by S&D Coffee.



Refreshing summer beverages featuring innovative iced tea and iced coffee flavors have gone upscale with a host of fresh ingredients — proving to be hot tickets in restaurants from coast to coast.

“Summer beverage LTOs are a wonderful way to add

excitement to a beverage program,” says Amy Myrdal Miller, president of Farmer’s Daughter Consulting, a culinary and nutrition communication firm. “I see many chains using lemonade, limeade, teas and coffees as the base for innovative beverages.”

Many savvy operators have figured out that creative beverages not only add color and panache to the menu but also help bolster the bottom line.

Despite their ubiquity, iced teas and coffees have become increasingly popular thanks in no small measure to such flavor variations as hibiscus iced tea and turtle-flavored iced coffee.

According to market research firm Datassential iced teas enjoy a 78-percent penetration in chain restaurants — an increase of 8 percent over the last nine years.

“Iced coffees and teas have come into their own by following the Starbucks model, which proved that patrons will pay more for a better product,” says menu trends expert Nancy Kruse, president of The Kruse Company. “As a result, operators are focusing on prep methods, like fresh brewing, and ingredients, like real cane sugar, to add value and boost sales.”

Clearly, seasonality plays a major role in beverage choices in the middle of summer on a hot, humid day as does offering a host of flavors to entice the adventurous millennials and the more predictable baby boomers.

Technomic’s MenuMonitor tracker, which categorizes menus from 6,645 brands from the top 500 chains, shows the top ingredients in non-alcohol beverages in the first quarter of 2015 are tea, coffee, milk, lemon and juice. Perhaps more enlightening the ingredients with the biggest increase of incidence in beverages since the first quarter of 2014 are kale, blackberry, blueberry, cucumber and spinach.

Famous Toastery, a six-unit full-service chain based in Davidson, N.C., is a case in point. “With summer upon us, Famous Toastery will be introducing a new green tea and cucumber mojito, starting in a few weeks,” says Robert Maynard, chief executive and co-founder of Famous Toastery.

“Famous Toastery is planning to add more variety to our tea selections. A few of the flavors we will be adding are mint, raspberry and peach.”

Iced tea flavors that are trending and should see robust growth, according to research firm Datassential, include sangria, melon, pineapple, guava, ginger, quince, Thai, sage, orange, passion fruit, pomegranate, blackberry, and cranberry.

“I feel like all 'unique' beverages are gaining in popularity. Consumers now want new and different dining choices and experiences, which carries over into drinks,” asserts David LaBorde, director of product development and vendor relations at 43-unit Salata, a fast-casual chain based in Houston with restaurants throughout Texas, Illinois and Southern California. “Today’s consumer wants to try new products — either a bottled drink they’ve never had or a uniquely crafted drink from a server.”

At 15-unit Fresh To Order, a fast-casual Atlanta-based chain, iced beverages are a staple and provide the opportunity to boost ticket averages.

“We do a variety of iced tea flavors — everything from cinnamon green apple to pomegranate citrus mint,” says Jesse Gideon, the chain’s chief operating officer. “Every day we run two different sweet teas as well as two unsweetened teas, two lemonades and one flavored water.”

Gideon says the chain is in the process of conducting a beverage overhaul and all options are on the table.

“We have been talking about adding some different iced coffees — maybe a Thai coffee with coconut milk,” says Gideon. “We are also looking at burnt lemons in coffee for an iced variety.”

Datassential says most operators have not yet begun to widely leverage descriptors that could impact the perceived value and quality of iced tea. Menu descriptors can help sell the product, and Datassential’s research notes pertaining to tea indicate there are plenty: specialty, gluten free, vitamin, antioxidant, house blend, housemade, organic homemade, premium, fresh, imported, all natural, fair trade, and vegan, among others.

According to Datassential the coffee flavors most often menued include mocha, Thai, latte, cappuccino, vanilla, caramel and espresso, but the flavors growing the fastest include turtle, raspberry, pumpkin, macchiato, cinnamon, chai, and white chocolate.

Each season at Bruegger’s Bagels an LTO coffee is available iced or hot. “This summer we’re offering Island Coconut Iced Coffee, which is a returning flavor that is really popular,” says Judy Kadylak, vice president of marketing at the 285-unit chain.

“Coffee used to be a morning beverage but guests want coffee — hot or iced — all day long. We offer both hot and iced for every kind of coffee we sell, and both varieties are available from open to close,” says Kadylak.

Bret Thorn, who is senior food and beverage editor at Nation’s Restaurant News, says cold-brewed iced coffee is all the rage.

“In terms of coffee, independent coffee houses are focusing on cold-brewed iced coffee in which ground coffee is steeped for many hours in ice water to create a concentrated coffee that fans say has deeper flavor and less bitterness than conventional brews,” says Thorn.

Famous Toastery's Maynard says iced coffee drinks are here to stay. "Iced coffee and frappes are items that are at their peak in popularity, and we don't see them going away anytime soon," he says. "People are expecting to get the same thing they get at their local coffee shop. Famous Toastery will be rolling out frappes this summer as well."

LaBorde says Salata's guests are ordering beverages that are perceived as healthy. "We have noticed more and more guests requesting and purchasing drinks with health benefits or with a healthy halo, resulting in year-over-year growth in sales of iced teas and lemonades," he says.

Consultant Myrdal Miller agrees that healthy is a key driver in iced coffees as well as iced teas, which often feature infused fresh fruits. "I'm excited to see more use of fresh fruit for offerings like strawberry lemonade and mango peach iced tea," she says. "And with the health halos around coffee, it's no surprise so many operators use it as the base for summer beverages."

Kadylak agrees. "Iced beverages are growing in popularity, especially in the summer, and they definitely enhance the bottom line," she says. "We've experienced a 20-percent increase year over year in this category for the last several years."

Refreshing summer beverages featuring innovative iced tea and iced coffee flavors have gone upscale with a host of fresh ingredients — proving to be hot tickets in restaurants from coast to coast.

"Summer beverage LTOs are a wonderful way to add excitement to a beverage program," says Amy Myrdal Miller, president of Farmer's Daughter Consulting, a culinary and nutrition communication firm. "I see many chains using lemonade, limeade, teas and coffees as the base for innovative beverages."

Many savvy operators have figured out that creative beverages not only add color and panache to the menu but also help bolster the bottom line.

Despite their ubiquity, iced teas and coffees have become increasingly popular thanks in no small measure to such flavor variations as hibiscus iced tea and turtle-flavored iced coffee.

According to market research firm Datassential iced teas enjoy a 78-percent penetration in chain restaurants — an increase of 8 percent over the last nine years.

"Iced coffees and teas have come into their own by following the Starbucks model, which proved that patrons will pay more for a better product," says menu trends expert Nancy Kruse, president of The Kruse Company. "As a result, operators are focusing on prep methods, like fresh brewing, and ingredients, like real cane sugar, to add value and boost sales."

Clearly, seasonality plays a major role in beverage choices in the middle of summer on a hot, humid day as does offering a host of flavors to entice the adventurous millennials and the more predictable baby boomers.

Technomic's MenuMonitor tracker, which categorizes menus from 6,645 brands from the top 500 chains, shows the top ingredients in non-alcohol beverages in the first quarter of 2015 are tea, coffee, milk, lemon and juice. Perhaps more enlightening the ingredients with the biggest increase of incidence in beverages since the first quarter of 2014 are kale, blackberry, blueberry, cucumber and spinach.

Famous Toastery, a six-unit full-service chain based in Davidson, N.C., is a case in point. "With summer upon us, Famous Toastery will be introducing a new green tea and cucumber mojito, starting in a few weeks," says Robert Maynard, chief executive and co-founder of Famous Toastery.

“Famous Toastery is planning to add more variety to our tea selections. A few of the flavors we will be adding are mint, raspberry and peach.”

Iced tea flavors that are trending and should see robust growth, according to research firm Datassential, include sangria, melon, pineapple, guava, ginger, quince, Thai, sage, orange, passion fruit, pomegranate, blackberry, and cranberry.

“I feel like all 'unique' beverages are gaining in popularity. Consumers now want new and different dining choices and experiences, which carries over into drinks,” asserts David LaBorde, director of product development and vendor relations at 43-unit Salata, a fast-casual chain based in Houston with restaurants throughout Texas, Illinois and Southern California. “Today’s consumer wants to try new products — either a bottled drink they’ve never had or a uniquely crafted drink from a server.”

At 15-unit Fresh To Order, a fast-casual Atlanta-based chain, iced beverages are a staple and provide the opportunity to boost ticket averages.

“We do a variety of iced tea flavors — everything from cinnamon green apple to pomegranate citrus mint,” says Jesse Gideon, the chain’s chief operating officer. “Every day we run two different sweet teas as well as two unsweetened teas, two lemonades and one flavored water.”

Gideon says the chain is in the process of conducting a beverage overhaul and all options are on the table.

“We have been talking about adding some different iced coffees — maybe a Thai coffee with coconut milk,” says Gideon. “We are also looking at burnt lemons in coffee for an iced variety.”

Datassential says most operators have not yet begun to widely leverage descriptors that could impact the perceived value and quality of iced tea. Menu descriptors can help sell the product, and Datassential’s research notes pertaining to tea indicate there are plenty: specialty, gluten free, vitamin, antioxidant, house blend, housemade, organic homemade, premium, fresh, imported, all natural, fair trade, and vegan, among others.

According to Datassential the coffee flavors most often menued include mocha, Thai, latte, cappuccino, vanilla, caramel and espresso, but the flavors growing the fastest include turtle, raspberry, pumpkin, macchiato, cinnamon, chai, and white chocolate.

Each season at Bruegger’s Bagels an LTO coffee is available iced or hot. “This summer we’re offering Island Coconut Iced Coffee, which is a returning flavor that is really popular,” says Judy Kadylak, vice president of marketing at the 285-unit chain.

“Coffee used to be a morning beverage but guests want coffee — hot or iced — all day long. We offer both hot and iced for every kind of coffee we sell, and both varieties are available from open to close,” says Kadylak.

Bret Thorn, who is senior food and beverage editor at Nation’s Restaurant News, says cold-brewed iced coffee is all the rage.

“In terms of coffee, independent coffee houses are focusing on cold-brewed iced coffee in which ground coffee is steeped for many hours in ice water to create a concentrated coffee that fans say has deeper flavor and less bitterness than conventional brews,” says Thorn.

Famous Toastery’s Maynard says iced coffee drinks are here to stay. “Iced coffee and frappes are items that are at their peak in popularity, and we don’t see them going away anytime soon,” he says. “People are expecting to get the same thing they get at their local coffee shop. Famous Toastery will be rolling out frappes this summer as well.”

Laborde says Salata's guests are ordering beverages that are perceived as healthy. "We have noticed more and more guests requesting and purchasing drinks with health benefits or with a healthy halo, resulting in year-over-year growth in sales of iced teas and lemonades," he says.

Consultant Myrdal Miller agrees that healthy is a key driver in iced coffees as well as iced teas, which often feature infused fresh fruits. "I'm excited to see more use of fresh fruit for offerings like strawberry lemonade and mango peach iced tea," she says. "And with the health halos around coffee, it's no surprise so many operators use it as the base for summer beverages."

Kadylak agrees. "Iced beverages are growing in popularity, especially in the summer, and they definitely enhance the bottom line," she says. "We've experienced a 20-percent increase year over year in this category for the last several years."